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SUBJECT: IVO JOSIPOVIC ELECTED CROATIA'S THIRD PRESIDENT

REF: ZAGREB 0014

11. (U) Ivo Josipovic, candidate of the main opposition Social Democratic Party (SDP), won the run-off election on January 10 garnering 60 percent of the vote to become Croatia's third president. Just after midnight, the Croatian Electoral Commission announced preliminary results (with 99 percent of polling stations reporting) showing Josipovic with 60.3 percent and his opponent Milan Bandic at 39.7 percent. Josipovic won an outright majority in 19 of 20 counties in Croatia and in all major urban areas including the capital of Zagreb, where Bandic is currently mayor. Turnout was 2,253,553 or 50.1% of registered voters. The one bright spot for Bandic was among diaspora voters in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where there was a record high turnout (compared to earlier Croatian elections), and Bandic won 94 percent of the nearly 100,000 votes cast. Josipovic will be sworn in as president at noon on February 18.

12. (U) Josipovic is a well-established expert on international criminal law as well as an award winning classical composer. He studied several months at Yale University Law School in 1988 and participated in a USG-sponsored International Visitors program in 2002 to Washington, Denver, Cincinnati and New York that dealt with US foreign policy and human rights issues. In his victory speech Josipovic focused his most forceful comments on the fight against corruption and said that Croatian citizens had joined him in "a grand alliance for justice." He emphasized "the need for us to unite in the fight against corruption and crime, which are the most serious threats to economic development, or any kind of social progress." Local media are hailing Josipovic's victory as a triumph of European values and a win for all Croatians who value honesty in government. Incumbent president Stjepan Mesic described Josipovic's election as a victory for a democratic and European Croatia. Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor congratulated Josipovic and voiced her confidence that they could work together to achieve Croatia's entry into the EU.

13. (SBU) COMMENT: Given Bandic's reputation for cronyism and the allegations of corruption connected to his management of Zagreb, Josipovic's victory provides reassurance that Croatia's recently invigorated efforts to address public corruption can be sustained. This will be particularly helpful as Croatia strives to meet the final requirements for EU accession in the coming year. It is also at least part of the reason why PM Kosor imposed a position of strict neutrality on her HDZ party structures in the second round, resisting any temptation to try and defeat Josipovic and thereby weaken the HDZ's greatest rival, the SDP. Josipovic's long-standing support of Croatian cooperation with the ICTY could also help the GoC to resolve the continuing concerns among certain EU member states about whether Croatia is truly meeting all of its obligations to the Court. As for relations with the US, Josipovic has been a close contact of the Embassy for many years, and while occasionally critical that the US has not always been consistent in our promotion of human rights, he has generally

been pro-American in his views. On issue of particular interest to the U.S., Josipovic has publicly supported Croatia's participation in NATO's ISAF mission. END COMMENT
WALKER